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ABSTRACT

The characteristics and objectives of women college students are examined as they relate to career choice and development. Data were obtained from students at four two-year colleges in New York City. Career innovators comprised one-fifth of the women in the sample, and aspired to a wide range of occupations in managerial and professional fields. Non-innovators almost always chose from a small range of traditional occupations such as nurse, teacher, or secretary. Women students' occupational choices resemble those of their fathers rather than their mothers. Moreover, they anticipate more continuous commitment to work over a 15-year period. Counselors need to be aware of several important differences between women with innovative and non-innovative career choices, and be sensitive to problems innovative women face. Counselors must also come to understand why these women do not generally seek help, and are resistant to it, despite difficulties. (Author/BEF)

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CAREER INNOVATORS AND NON-INNOVATORS: IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELING FROM A STUDY OF URBAN TWO-YEAR COLLEGE WOMEN

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To date, little research has been available concerning important elements of women's experience in the two-year college. Even though the relatively recent growth of community colleges throughout the country has stimulated an accompanying need for information about the two-year college student, most of the existing research on student characteristics and college influence involves the four-year college or university. Further, although a number of studies have investigated both junior and senior college students, they frequently have not examined the characteristics and objectives of the women college students separately or in depth.

This lack of research specifically focused on women extends to the general area of career choice and career development. While researchers such as Super (1963), Ginsburg (1951), Holland (1966), and others have attempted to provide generally applicable theories of vocational development, most of the actual research activity has centered on male subjects. The recent interest in the careers and work histories of women has resulted in directing attention to the special conditions which affect the decisions girls and women make concerning their educational preparation as well as their selection and choice of occupations (Astin, 1970). For this reason, Zytowski (1969) and Psathas (1968) support separate theories of career development for women. Each theory considers such factors as family background, social class and social mobility, motivation and reward as possibly operating in different ways for women than for men.

In particular, the literature reflects a great deal of research on the topics of career versus homemaking orientations and role-innovation among women as part of an outgrowth of interest in the reasons for sex-stereotyping of occupations. A number of characteristics have been associated with role-innovative tendencies in women in previous research. Almquist and Angrist (1970) feel that such an inclination may be the result of broadening or enriching experiences in childhood. In a study of college women, Hawley (1972) reported that those preparing for non-traditional careers believe that men do not see behaviors as being as strongly sex linked as do traditional women, and that non-traditional women are more concerned with male support than traditional

women. Several researchers (Tangri, 1972, 1969, Trigg and Perlman. 1976) have found these innovators to be more autonomous, more individualistic, internally motivated with greater career commitment as well as more likely to have educated working mothers. Tangri further asserts that mothers of role-innovative women often have role-innovative careers as well. These women also exhibit a more theoretical-analytical orientation (Karman, 1972, Lawlis and Crawford, 1975). Farmer and Bohn (1970) found that role-innovators are more likely to successfully integrate the roles of homemaker and worker. Other researchers have focused on new determinants of career choice for women such as economic independence (Sherman and Jones, 1976) and feminism (parelius, 1975). However, most of these studies have concentrated on the four year college woman who aspires to professional level occupational goals. These factors may affect two-year college women in different ways and may carry different implications for counseling in this institutional setting.

More closely approximating the specific institutional setting of the research reported here, Kane, Frazee and Dee (1976) studied woman in two-year postsecondary vocational education programs who planned to enter traditional and non-traditional occupations. Although this research was limited to women training for non-professional level occupations, the researchers investigated a number of variables related to counseling services. They reported that counseling programs designed to assist students with career decision-making were not performing effectively for women, particularly with regard to non-traditional women. Nearly two-thirds of all non-traditional women had experienced some difficulty in adjusting to training; more specifically, they found that the larger the number of women students in a class, the smaller the percentage of women who have problems. Further, low-income, urban, minority women in non-traditional programs felt least prepared for their postsecondary vocational training, indicating a need for special efforts on their behalf.

In other research, a few selected studies such as Christensen (1977) on Puerto Ricans and Jones (1973) and Copeland (1977) on Black women were useful in discussing the general counseling needs of these two groups. A

study by Hudesman, Weisner and Waxner (1976) which focuses specifically on urban community college students' perception of counseling found no significant differences by sex. However, they did not break down either sex by type of occupational or career choice, only by academic major. While the findings related generally to the setting of the present research, they did not include analysis of innovative and non-innovative women. Research by Scott, Fenske, and Maxey (1973) did find significant differences in vocational choices between men and women in community colleges but the study does not probe the counseling aspect. Research by Wigent (1974) also investigated personality variables related to career decision-making in two-year college students. Since the conceptual framework he employed parallels the work by Scott and Maxey cited above. Finally, the previous work of the authors in New York State (Moore and Veres, 1976; Moore 1975; Moore and Veres 1974) were particularly useful in establishing working hypothesis and linked comparisons. However, the setting of the four urban institutions provided much new information.

Procedure

A structured questionnaire was developed and field tested to obtain basic demographic data and to test hypothesis of the present study. It was revised and administered to a sample of students during the 1975 school year at four two-year colleges in New York City. Both male and female students were included in the sample to permit comparisons and to avoid reactiveness and/or response bias. Data were coded and analyzed by packaged computer programs utilizing bivariate and multivariate statistical techniques.

Data were obtained from a sample of students at four two-year colleges in New York City. Inclusion of the colleges in the study was bored on the nature and scope of their programming (particularly for women), the diversity of their students, and the variety of their philosophies and administrative structures. A total of 1791 students (1007 women and 784 men) completed the questionnaires.

The occupations of the women in the sample were coded according to the innovativeness of their career choice. Coding was based on the percentage of women employed in the occupation nationally, using census figures for 1970. In this study, career innovators are women who have selected careers in which 0 to 40 percent women are presently employed. Examples of these occupations include lawyer, physician, college professor, journalist, accountant, and sales manager. Non-innovators are women who plan to enter occupations in which 70 to 100 percent of these employed are women, such as nurse, teacher, secretary, dietitian, and librarian. These two categories yielded a subsample of 227 innovators and 590 non-innovators. The remainder of the women were either undecided about their future career choice (n=150) or career moderates (n=30) who planned to enter occupations composed almost equally of men and women (41-70 percent women). Ten women did not report occupations and could not be included. The present analysis is based on the two extreme groups: the career innovators and the non-innovators, a total of 817 women.

Findings: Career Choice and Future Plans

The career innovators comprised approximately one-fifth of the women in the total sample. At all four institutions women with traditional career choices were most numerous, totaling over half (58%) of the women in the sample. Before discussing the findings related to counseling activities let us specify a few of the significant differences which distinguish innovators and non-innovators.

First the career innovators in the sample aspired to a wide range of occupations, primarily in managerial and professional fields. In contrast, over 90 percent of the non-innovators were concentrated in a few occupations. such as registered nurse, teacher or secretary.

Innovators and non-innovators had significantly different reasons for selecting their careers. Non-innovators indicated that being helpful to society (27%) was a prime motive in making their career choice followed by

high salary (17%) and working with people (16%). Innovators indicated their top three reasons for their occupational choice were high salary (22%), being helpful to society (12%) and creativity (12%).

Innovators also differed in their preference for a future employer. In keeping with their numerous choices in the fields of business and management, they tended to select business (46%) and government (17%) as employers. In contrast, non-innovators preferred health care institutions (51%) or educational institutions (16%).

Innovators and non-innovators significantly differed with respect to ethnic background. Although white students made up 45.5 percent of the sample, they composed over one-half (52.4%) of the innovators. Hence, minority women, particularly black and Hispanic students, were underrepresented among the innovators.

Studies of four-year college women have suggested that innovators are more career-oriented than their more traditional classmates and that innovators are more likely to plan to work after marriage and children. In this sample, however, the future plans of the two groups did not differ significantly. Most of the women (90%) expected to work after marriage and a majority (60%) expected to continue work after their children were born.

Perceptions of Counseling

Beyond investigating the similarities and differences between basic characteristics of innovative and non-innovative women, we were interested in investigating how these women perceived the counseling services provided in their colleges. Specifically, we wanted to know if innovators appeared to be having different problems or more problems than the more traditional women and how helpful they perceived counseling services to be.

When asked about their specific problems during the school year, registration and course selection was the number one problem for all women

in the sample (Table 1). Approximately three-quarters (76.6%) of the women students indicated that it was some problem for them; for 40 percent of these women it was a major problem. Although this problem area was common to all the women surveyed, there were two problem areas which significantly differentiated innovators and non-innovators ($p < .05$ or better using chi square tests). Innovators were more likely to name graduation or academic requirements and personal problems, especially as major problems.

Table 1
Problems Reported by Innovators and Non-Innovators

Problem Area	Some or Major Problems					
	Innovators			Non-Innovators		
	N	%	Total	N	%	Total
Availiability of Major/Specialization	93	47.7	197	229	48.2	475
Regristration/course selection	156	73.2	213	405	78.0	519
Graduation or academic requirements*	81	42.0	193	163	34.9	467
Academic problems	86	44.3	194	246	51.9	474
Vocational choice	67	35.3	190	129	28.2	457
Personal problems*	109	54.5	200	219	46.5	471
College regulations	45	23.2	194	85	18.3	465
College services	59	30.9	191	126	27.7	454
Other problems	6	18.2	33	17	19.1	89

*Chi square test, $p < .05$

Although most women indicated one or more areas in which they had experienced problems during the year, one in ten of the women (12.2%) reported no problems of any kind and approximately 2 out of 5 women (41.5%) said they had no major problem areas.

As indicated in Table 2, innovators and non-innovators did not significantly differ in the number of more serious problems reported. The women surveyed were more likely to report one or two major problems (48.1% of all women); only 10.4 percent of the sample name as many as 3 or more areas.

Table 2
Number of Major Problems Reported by Innovators and Non-Innovators

Number of Major Problems Reported	Innovators N	Innovators %	Non-Innovators N	Non-Innovators %
0	91	39.4	232	40.8
1	75	32.5	190	33.4
2	39	16.9	96	16.9
3 or more	26	11.3	51	9.0
	231	100.0	569	100.0

Innovators were significantly more likely never to have met with a counselor at their institution during the current school year (Table 3). In spite of the fact that stated policy at one of the colleges in the sample favored frequent contact by counselors with students, almost one-third of all women (27.7%) reported that they had never met with a college counselor; another third had met with a counselor once a semester or less (31.5%). Although the remainder (40.5%) indicated they had met a counselor twice a semester or more, only one in four women consulted a counselor once a month or more.

Table 3
Frequency of Meetings with College Counselors Reported by Innovators and Non-Innovators

Frequency of Meeting	Innovators N	Innovators %	Non-Innovators N	Non-Innovators %
Once a month or more	50	22.1	141	25.2
Twice a semester	21	9.3	106	18.9
Once/semester or less	73	32.3	179	31.6
Never	82	36.3	136	24.3
	226	100.0	560	100.0

Chi square test $p < .001$

Since some of the women surveyed said they had no problems (12.2%) or no major problems (41.5%), the question arose whether there were differences between innovators and non-innovators who did report problems but had never seen a college counselor. When all the women who never consulted a counselor were compared with the various problem areas, there were still differences between innovators and non-innovators. Table 4 indicates that when considering all problem areas, more innovators had never met with a counselor.

Table 4
A Comparison of Women Who
Expressed Problems But Never
Met With a Counselor

Problem Area Reported	Never Met Counselor			
	Innovators		Non-Innovators	
	N	%	N	%
Availability of major/ specialization	28	30.1	52	22.8
Registration/course selection*	56	35.9	99	24.6
Graduation or academic requirement**	33	40.7	39	24.1
Academic problems	31	36.0	60	24.5
Vocational choice	27	40.3	32	24.8
Personal problems*	38	34.9	46	21.1
College regulations	16	35.6	22	25.9
College services	19	32.2	32	25.4

Chi square test, *$p < .05$
**$p < .01$

Moreover, the areas such as graduation or academic requirements registration and course selection which differentiated innovators and non-innovators are precisely the areas in which one would expect counselors in the educational institution to be consulted and to have been of direct assistance. Among innovators, 40.3 percent of those women reporting a problem with vocational choice had never consulted a counselor. In view of their innovative career choice and expressed problem with vocational choice, these women constitute a clientele with particular need for counseling services.

In order to get an indication of students' perceptions about their college counselors we asked students how helpful they perceived counselors

to be. Since nearly one-third of the students had indicated that they had never met with a counselor, as a check on the consistency of the data, we would expect that at least the same number of students would select "no opinion" when asked about the helpfulness of counselors. Indeed, 39.4 percent of all the women selected that response. Of the women who did have an opinion, the majority (51.4%) felt counseling is helpful to some degree.

The women's sample was analyzed according to innovators and non-innovators on the question of helpfulness of counselors and then compared to the number of major problems reported. As Table 5 indicates, the non-innovators are fairly evenly divided on the helpfulness of counselors regardless of the number of problems they have, with the majority responding that counselors were at least somewhat helpful. The innovators, on the other hand, responded more discriminatingly. The most positive group of innovators concerning the helpfulness of counselors are those who report no major problems. Women with 3 or more problems are least positive with over 1 in 5 regarding counselors as "no help" at all. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that regardless of number of problems innovators were more likely to have no opinion of counselors thereby indicating in another way that they were more likely than non-innovators not to have ever met with a counselor.

Table 5

Innovators' and Non-Innovators' Opinions on the Helpfulness of Counseling Services by Number of Major Problems

	Innovators (N=227)				Non-Innovators (N=552)			
Problems	Very Helpful %	Somewhat Helpful %	No Help %	No Opinion %	Very Helpful %	Somewhat Helpful %	No Help %	No Opinion %
None	25.3	31.0	3.4	40.2	21.8	37.0	6.0	35.2
1	8.0	36.0	10.7	45.3	17.9	36.3	8.9	36.8
2	23.1	23.1	8.5	41.0	18.8	35.4	12.5	33.3
3 or more	3.8	11.5	23.1	61.5	12.0	38.0	18.0	32.0

Results and Conclusions

Conclusions from the general background data for these women suggest that they are more similar to urban four-year college women than the "new students" who have entered two-year colleges most recently (Cross, 1972). Nevertheless, there are differences from previous research findings, many of which appear in the women's plans for labor force participation. The women's occupational choices resemble those of their fathers more than their mothers, with nearly 80 percent planning for professional, administrative or managerial positions. Moreover, the women students anticpate more continuous commitment to work. Approximately 70 percent expect to be working 15 years hence and 40 percent expect to work continuously throughout this fifteen year period.

Although true role innovativeness is expressed by only one-fifth of the sample, variations from the traditional feminine lifestyle of schooling, marriage, then housekeeping are strongly present. Work will play an increasingly important part in these two-year college women's lives, not solely because of any national trends in job opportunities for women, although that is important, but because the women themselves are determining that work apart from family is important to them.

Although innovators and non-innovators were quite similar in the number of major problems reported, innovators were more likely to report difficulty with personal problems and graduation requirements. Yet over one third of these women had never met with a college counselor during the year.

Our research profiles indicate several important differences between women with innovative and non-innovative career choices. Counselors will need to take these different life plans, values, and interests into account when working with women students. They also should become sensitive to the problems that innovative women face and aid, wherever possible, in eliminating problem areas. A question that counselors should ask themselves is: Why do career innovative women choose not to meet with counselors in spite

of the greater frequency with which they report having problems? Since the career innovative women are often found among the better students and since their reported problems lie in several areas directly related to counselors' sphere of experise, this question is especially challenging.

These findings and the findings of a previous study by the authors (Moore and Veres, 1976) suggest that innovators resist counseling despite the struggles they are having. Is it the result of past unsympathetic experiences; is it dogged individualism on the part of "career pioneers," or is it something in the current college or counseling environment that gives negative signals to these women? Further research should focus on this phenomenon and attempt to discern its source. The information obtained through these investigations will be helpful to two-year college administrators, counselors, and faculty in planning programs and counseling and advising activities to meet the needs of young women as well as contributing to knowledge concerning the characteristics and plans of two-year college students generally.

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